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THE KERAMIC MUSEUM OF SÈVRES.

SECOND AND CONCLUDING ARTICLE.

FINE FAÏENCE.



Fig. 1. — CHINESE PORCELAIN VASE.

THE wares which we shall now proceed to consider form a series by themselves. They are still faïence, but faïence perfected by the introduction, either in the body, or the glaze, or the enamel, of matters foreign to them, and which give to them greater consistence and more resistance to wear. The introduction of silicates, phosphates, or kaolins into the pastes, and the use of oxide of cobalt for the purpose of whitening them, together with the introduction of borax into the covering substances, carried the manufacture of faïence—which began with modest white pipe-clay, simply lead-glazed—to the point shown us to-day by the manufactories of Staffordshire and by some of those of France.

Case 38 contains fine French faïence, such as the products of Oiron, to which collectors apply the more resonant name of Henri-Deux Ware ; of Longwy (Moselle) ; of the Rue du Pont-aux-Choux, remarkable as being cast from silver vessels ; of Orleans, which is distinguished by its violet color ; of Apt, in which the body, superficially veined in yellow and black, is decorated with reliefs in white ; and of Sèvres, where Lambert made it from 1785 to 1790.

Case 39 is devoted to foreign faïence of the same kind from England, Germany, and Italy.

SOFT PORCELAIN.

It will be sufficient to recall the fact that soft paste porcelain is not true porcelain, but a semi-vitreous, semi-opaque substance, — a *frit*, as it is called, — by means of which the attempt was made to imitate the very beautiful products of unknown composition which, from the close of the Middle Ages, came to Europe from the extreme Orient, principally by way of Venice.

In Case 40, Italy is represented by the soft pastes of Florence with the arms of the Medici, of Venice in imitation of Oriental porcelains, and of Capo di Monte ; France, by those of Rouen with Poterat, of Saint-Cloud with the Chicaneaus, and of Chantilly ; England, by those of Chelsea, Worcester, and Derby ; and Spain, by those of Talavera. In a case in the corresponding bay the soft pastes of Vincennes and of Sèvres are exhibited. But it does not contain many very fine pieces, and it will hardly receive many accessions at the prices which these wares bring at present, unless it be by gifts or unforeseen legacies. There are some, however, which show the colors most prized by amateurs.

The manufacture of soft paste ceased at Sèvres in 1804, but was again taken up in 1849 by Ébelmen and Regnault. At present, it has once more been wellnigh abandoned. The pieces which Mme. Apoil decorates are, however, so charming, that the failure to make serious attempts to return to the old style of decoration is to be regretted, as this style is admirably adapted to small pieces, which are the only ones that can be made of this substance.

HARD PORCELAIN.

We now come to the true porcelain, that in which the paste is made of kaolin, — an earth which is produced by the decomposition of feldspathic rocks, — and with a glaze of the same nature.

Cases 41 to 44, Chinese, and Case 45, Japanese porcelains, completely upset the ideas which used to be inculcated upon us, and against which our ignorance constantly rebelled, to wit, the distinction between the wares of China and those of Japan. The method was somewhat radical in its simplicity: all that was common or ordinary belonged to China; all that was perfect belonged to Japan. But now the Japanese themselves have come to tell us that the porcelain industry was only quite recently imported into their country from China, having been introduced thence as late as the beginning of the sixteenth century. As to the porcelain of Corea, that is almost entirely out of the question now, more especially since the shipments made by French agents commissioned to purchase pieces of undoubted origin have revealed to us a strange state of barbarism. Thus all classifications are upset. But the porcelain of Persia is still spoken of, and we even publish a specimen (Fig. 2) decorated with low reliefs under a green glaze.

The bays which correspond to the cases devoted to Oriental porcelain are filled with architectural details in enamelled stone-ware of Chinese manufacture.

Retracing our steps on the opposite side of the row of central cases, we continue to follow the series of hard porcelain, but the specimens here exhibited are of European manufacture.

Cases 46 to 50 contain Saxon porcelain, the first made in Europe. The specimens of white ware decorated in relief are not of the most beautiful kind, such as may be studied in the Japanese Palace at Dresden; but we shall find some of the deceptive imitations of Chinese decoration, in which the branches of the peach-tree serve as a motive, and which was in turn imitated on soft paste at Chantilly. Specimens of the porcelain of Vienna, remarkable for its gilding in relief, of Berlin, and of Bavaria, are also to be seen in these cases, while that of Belgium, Switzerland, and Sweden will be found in Case 51.

Cases 52 and 53 are filled with French porcelain of various origin. In 52 we can study specimens of the eighteenth century from Paris (Clignancourt, La Courtille, Le Carrousel, Locré), from Niederwiller by Custine, from Strasburg by the Hanongues, and from Lille, where the first experiments in firing with coal were made in 1783. Case 53 is given up to the nineteenth-century wares from Paris, by Dihl, from Orleans, Caen, Bordeaux, and Limoges. We will call attention to two medallions in hard paste, casts from terra-cottas of Nini, which are said to have been made in 1759 by Brancas-Lauraguais with kaolin from Alençon. The other pieces are almost exclusively table ware. It cannot be said that all these specimens are artistically very elegant and pleasing. They belong, for the most part, to an epoch the products of which have fallen into well-merited discredit. But they hold an honorable place in a collection which is principally technical, and they mark the progress afterwards accomplished by the industry to which the manufactory of Sèvres is specially devoted.

Cases 54 to 60 bring us to the hard porcelain of Sèvres. The first three are devoted to early specimens, still inspired by the models used for soft paste, but which underwent a slow transformation under the influence of the school of David, represented in the industrial arts by Percier. The strange aberrations of taste at this epoch have been sufficiently dwelt upon by others, and we shall not repeat what they have said in the presence of a case entirely filled with plates decorated with landscapes, and vases covered with historical paintings. With Case 57 begins the series of more modern porcelain, and that of the experiments to which the products of Sèvres owe their present physiognomy. Case 60—the last—contains biscuit.

In the three corresponding bays the first place is occupied by the faïence made at Sèvres about twenty years ago, before private industry applied itself seriously to the development of this manufacture, and carried it to the point at which it was seen at the last Exposition. And in this connection it seems proper to remark that this branch of modern ceramic industry is quite incompletely represented in the Museum, although the lower parts of the cases are generally reserved for the contemporary products of each group shown in the upper part. Sèvres has given up the manufacture of faïence, as well as that of glazed earthen-ware, which no longer presented any technical difficulties. We regret, however, that M. Robert, through whose hands everything has passed that has been made at Sèvres these many years, since he administered and organized the new manufacture, did not continue to produce some large pieces, which, by the richness of their forms and the freedom or the simplicity of their coloring, would harmonize better in certain situations than porcelain, the contours of which must necessarily be rigid.

The remarkable enamels of M. Gobert, although sometimes applied to rather questionable forms, cause us to



Fig. 2.—PERSIAN PORCELAIN FLASK.

regret that the enamelling shop has also been closed. The beautiful decorations in *pâtes rapportées* which this eminent artist makes at present do not hinder us from remembering that he is the only incontestable and direct successor of the great enamellers of Limoges of the sixteenth century.

The pictures upon porcelain, however remarkable the results may be, and however great the difficulties which their execution presents, remind us too strongly of the vases and plates in the case before us.

One case is devoted to the trial specimens made during the last twenty-five years, according to the experiments with high-fire colors prosecuted in the laboratory by M. A. Salvétat.

All decorated pottery, if it is to be as perfect as its nature will permit, ought to allow of firing body and decoration simultaneously; that is to say, one and the same temperature must suffice to fuse the colors and to incorporate them with the glaze, and this latter must attach itself absolutely to the excipient. Some of these colors are fluid, like the cobalt blues, and mix with the glaze without forming a relief; others are thick, and not transparent. In China, those pieces of porcelain which have a uniform or variegated ground are decorated according to the principle just enunciated. For flower designs, animals, or figures, colors of greater fusibility are employed, and sometimes even those colors are used which can be fired in the muffle. But as the composition of the body and the glaze of Chinese porcelain allows firing at a much lower temperature than that which is necessary for Sèvres porcelain (the composition of which differs somewhat from the Chinese), the colors, especially those which fuse at a medium temperature (*couleurs de demi-grand feu*), combine with and are enveloped by the glaze. The only color known at Sèvres which could be submitted to the same firing as the body, was for a long time the lapis-lazuli blue, the well-known radiant and deep blue of Sèvres. All the others were either colors *de demi-grand feu*, or muffle colors. These colors, however, not only made the palette of the painter all the richer, but even too rich. There was a discord between the nature of the ground and that of the surface. Very often the glaze did not cover the painting, and the latter had the same aspect that it might have presented had it been painted on faïence or on japanned tin. Hence, when the study of the conditions of decorative art had shown that an intimate harmony ought to exist between the ornament and the material, it became necessary to seek colors which could stand the same temperature as the porcelain, in order to be able to decorate the latter as it ought to be decorated, and as it is in the East.

This is the aim which M. Salvétat sought to reach by his experiments, and we shall not complain overmuch because his labors have not yet succeeded in supplying the artists of Sèvres with all the colors of the prism. Decorative painting must be simple, and it is not desirable that those who practise it should have too many resources at their disposal. The difficulties are complicated, moreover, by the fact that the temperature of the Chinese kilns is much lower than that of the Sèvres kilns. Chinese porcelains which were passed through the latter showed marked changes in their forms, as well as in their colors, many of which completely evaporated. But, nevertheless, we have to-day in high-fire colors all the shades of blue and green, certain yellows, and several reds. All we want is the scale of orange-reds and of deep yellows.

The blues are obtained from oxides of cobalt, and their hue varies according to treatment; if calcined with the oxides of zinc, they tend towards violet, while the oxides of manganese impart to them a greenish hue. The oxide of uranium produces either yellow or black, according as the flame of the furnace is oxidizing or not. The reds, finally, are produced by what the English call *pink color*, which is a combination of tin and chromium (stannate of oxide of chromium), or by aluminate of chromium, which is, in fact, artificial ruby. As for the blacks, they are produced from the oxides of iridium and ruthenium, and for the grays powdered platinum is used.

These are the colors employed in the decoration of the porcelain lately made, and exhibited at the Champ de Mars, by the manufactory at Sèvres,—which invented the recipes and gave the impulse,—as well as by private manufactories, such as those of M. Pillivuyt at Limoges, and MM. Haëhe and Pepin-Lehalleur at Vierzon. Greater liberty, greater simplicity, and consequently greater boldness, than in the old decoration will be noticed here: the greater breadth of execution is in accord with the dimensions of the large pieces. A tendency will also be discovered towards the method of decoration *à la barbotine* (colors mixed with liquid paste), which is used on earthen-ware. In fact, the means are the same, only the degrees of heat in firing are singularly different. What is needed to enable painting on porcelain to acquire all its intensity and lustre, is a temperature which will reduce the half-baked and porous wares, of which the Parisian manufacturers of to-day are guilty to such an extent, to a shapeless and dull mass. Furthermore, the gaps which the palette of high-fire colors show, force the decorators into a certain sobriety, quite in the spirit of the Chinese, our masters in this art.

The application of white, semi-transparent pastes on a colored ground, tried since 1852, and carried out by M. Solon on a series of cups, in connection with high-fire painting, constitutes one of the greatest innovations in decoration for which the ceramic industry is indebted to Sèvres. Provided that it is not executed upon grounds of an unfit color, such as the more or less grayish rose and violet tints which did such injury to the Sèvres exhibition of 1867, we can only felicitate those courageous artists, MM. Gely, Damousse, Gobert, and Bulot, who practise this species of decoration at Sèvres.

But let us return to the Museum. The last bay is filled with groups in terra-cotta, which were made in the

eighteenth century for reproduction in biscuit. Among them there are charming pieces, like the one we publish. (Fig. 3.) Some are broken. This is the work of those who, arms in hand, came in 1870, as every one knows, to lead our corrupted country back to virtue. The extremity of the gallery is devoted to Oriental pottery. The



Fig. 3.—THE OFFERING TO CUPID.—MODEL OF A GROUP IN BISCUIT.

plaster moulds, which, being absorbent, deprive the paste of its water, and almost immediately give it a certain consistence. Again, the paste may be run into moulds in a liquid state,—reduced *en barbotine*, as it is called technically,—in which case the moulds are very thick, so as to increase their power of absorption. The *barbotine* which is in immediate contact with the mould loses its water, and is deposited on the surface. In this manner are obtained those thin and light pieces which seem to be but egg-shell. If the paste is left in the mould for a longer time, the layer thickens, and adheres to the mould, while the surplus of the liquid paste may be poured out. But if the piece is of tolerably large size, so that the soft crust has some weight, it sometimes happens that it breaks down within itself. To force the crust to retain its position after the liquid paste has been emptied, and while it is drying sufficiently to allow of the removal of the mould without danger, the pouring off is performed under a certain atmospheric pressure. This pressure of the air replaces that of the liquid, and holds the slightly solidified crust in position. The grand vases of state manufactured at Sèvres for several years past were made by this process, under the direction of M. E. Milet.

entrance is marked by figures of Chinese warriors, of tolerably large size, and the centre is occupied by the Mussulman tomb which figured at the Indian exhibition of the Champ de Mars.

Technical collections fill the rooms on one side, glassware and mosaics those of the other. In the first are shown the materials used in China and at Sèvres, the different stages of the manufacture, the defects which may occur, the remedies which may be applied and the means which may be used to prevent them, the shrinkage which the pieces undergo, etc.

But there are things which these cases cannot show. Such are the ingenious processes employed in making large, and more especially colossal pieces, as, for instance, the various pieces which compose the *Vase of Neptune*, placed in the centre of the entrance hall. Every one knows, more or less, that in the manufacturing of pottery argillaceous earths are used, whatever their composition may be, ground up with water, and reduced to paste of a certain consistence. The vessels are fashioned with the hand, with the aid of a few very simple tools, upon horizontal wheels or turntables (the potter's wheel). Porcelain is also thus made.

But it is likewise pressed in

We have little to say of the glass section. The manufacture of glass has never been carried on at Sèvres, but glass painting has been practised there. Painting is the word, which is often out of place when applied to the products of industry; for the windows for the subterranean chapels at Dreux, which were executed here, are veritable paintings. It is possible to speak severely of the designs, which, however, were furnished to the manufactory. We shall only except the one which Eugène Delacroix composed for the upper chapel of Dreux, and which, in color as well as in design, is conceived in the still Gothic spirit of the beginning of the sixteenth century. But we must not overlook the fact, that Sèvres set the example to private industry, and did not abandon the execution of stained glass windows until after this industry had been able to profit by its mistakes, as well as by its teachings.

At present an atelier for mosaic is established at Sèvres. From it came the frieze composed by M. Charles Lameire, which gives a little pleasant coloring to the cold monumental building in which the Ceramic Museum is sheltered, and the walls of which ought to have received an ample polychromic decoration in lava and enamelled faïence. Its aspect would then have announced its purpose. Let us hope that the master mosaicists who came from Rome did not bring with them the twenty thousand types of vitreous substances which they had at their disposal in the ateliers of the Vatican, and that Murano will not send them the thirty-six thousand shades which it can produce. As in the case of the Gobelins, a palette of such abundant richness is useless. The decorative arts do not require so much.

The Ceramic Museum of Sèvres, to which we return once more before we finally leave it, presents certain gaps which it would be easy to indicate. But its Curator, M. Champfleury, is active, and takes an interest in all manifestations of art, especially in its popular form, — and is there an art more popular than that which finds its means of expression in ceramics? He is seconded by public favor, and a success which we would call European, if it were not universal, has already recompensed him for the order and the method he has introduced into the classification of the objects exhibited. Moreover, he has time at his disposal, and — a rare thing, indeed, especially in a museum — he has a budget which is nearly sufficient. What else could one desire?

ALFRED DARCEL. (In *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*.)



Fig. 4. — SAVIGNIES PLATE.